

VISITATION WITH A PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE FAMILY

If the adoption worker determines that it may be beneficial for the child to have visits with a prospective adoptive family **that has an approved adoptive family assessment**, visits may be scheduled by the adoption worker. It may be necessary to provide the prospective adoptive family with direction regarding proper conduct and demeanor during the visits so that the child experiences a minimum of emotional distress. If the visiting family is unable to comply with the conditions established by the child placing agency, it may be necessary to discontinue visits.

When the best interest of the child is served by a change of placement for the child, it is recommended that visits begin and be gradually increased to allow the child to make an emotional transition to the prospective adoptive family. The child's age, developmental stage, and emotional well-being must be considered in preparing the child for a placement change. The number of visits prior to placement will depend on the age of the child and how ready he or she is to make the transition. The aim is to make as seamless a transition as possible, with everyone focusing on the best interests of the child.

If possible, visits should increase in length from a brief visit in the beginning to extended visits prior to replacement and be based on the child's adjustment to the visits. Overnight visitations between the child and the prospective adoptive family prior to petition must not exceed 10 consecutive calendar days, unless the family is licensed to provide foster care [MCL 722.111(i) (i)].

Note: Per FOM 903-7, payments to the child's foster family may only be continued for a period of five days when a child is temporarily absent from the placement.

Case Conference

If, at any time, a determination is made that visitation or placement with the prospective adoptive family does not appear to be in the child's best interest, the concerned parties must meet to discuss the issues. For state wards, if a resolution is not achieved, the Michigan Children's Institute may provide consultation.

MAINTAINING EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS

Following termination of parental rights, it may be important for the emotional welfare of the child to continue the child's existing relationships with persons who are not directly responsible for the care of the child but who have been important in the child's life. Such relationships may include siblings, other relatives or unrelated persons with whom the child has a psychological attachment. These important relationships must be documented in the DHS-1927, Child's Adoptive Assessment (RFF 1927).

Decisions regarding visitation for the child must be made in consultation between the foster care worker, the adoption worker and the workers' supervisors. The child's lawyer-guardian ad litem and the Michigan Children's Institute (MCI) office may also be consulted, as appropriate.

Note: Mediation may be helpful in establishing a mutually agreeable visitation arrangement in which it is determined that continuing contact by an approved person with an existing relationship to the child, other than the adopting family, may be beneficial for the child. However, following adoption of the child by an approved family, any decisions about visitation between the child and any parties are at the discretion of the adoptive parent. Pursuant to MCL 710.60, the adoptive parents have complete authority to make decisions regarding the adoptee. Decisions by the adoptive parents to support visits with other persons are voluntary.

Adoption workers should assist in developing positive relationship connections and elicit the services of professional counselors when appropriate. Workers must educate the child's caregivers regarding the importance of these connections to the child's sense of identity. The adoptive family selection must consider a prospective adoptive family's willingness to maintain existing relationships with people important to the child.

Scheduling visits to maintain an existing relationship during adoption planning must be based on the best interest of the child. Factors that must be considered are:

- The child's emotional and physical well-being.
- The child's age and developmental maturity.
- The benefit to the child of maintaining the relationship.

- The ability of the visiting person to establish an environment that will allow the child to benefit from visits. It may be necessary or advisable to supervise the visits while they continue.

Maintaining Sibling Relationships

Unless it has been determined that sibling visits are not in the child's best interest, a child's visits with siblings must continue at the interval established prior to the termination of parental rights until the court has signed an Order Placing Child. If visits are discontinued, the decision and the reason(s) why must be documented in the quarterly adoption reports.

Post Placement Visitations

Once the PCA 320, Order Placing Child After Consent, has been signed, the adoptive parents determine the visitation plan for the child.